



## STATE OF MICHIGAN

### **Hearing Loss Awareness op-ed**

Most of us go through life without pausing to think what it would be like if we couldn't actually hear what was going on around us. We tend to take sounds for granted – cars passing by, our children's voices, the phone ringing. But many people are not as fortunate and have some level of hearing loss. This ranges from not hearing certain pitches to being totally deaf.

Currently 31 million Americans have hearing loss, with about 1.4 million of those in Michigan. Everyday approximately three in 1,000 infants are born profoundly deaf or with partial hearing loss, making it the number one birth defect in America.

Hearing loss can greatly hinder ordinary communication and everyday tasks and can create a sense of isolation and low self-confidence for those affected.

Yet, while 95 percent of the people with hearing loss could be successfully treated with hearing aids or listening devices, only 22 percent currently use them.

Advanced technology is bridging the gap between those who can and cannot hear. Hearing devices have improved dramatically in recent years, and are much smaller and more sophisticated than the ones earlier generations used. The problem is many people are not aware of these devices and how to obtain or afford them.

It is important that people with hearing loss in Michigan be aware that there are many deaf and hard of hearing organizations, audiologists, hearing professionals, assistive listening device manufacturers and support groups that offer a large range of solutions to help everyday living be more enjoyable.

That is why we are welcoming the Hearing Loss Association of Michigan and the Michigan Deaf Association to the state Capitol for Hearing Loss Awareness Day on May 17. We encourage everyone to join us and learn more about hearing loss and improving communication in the state for those who are hard of hearing.

By Sen. Patty Birkholz and Rep. Jerry Kooiman.

Contact: 517-373-3447 for confirmation